

# Postcards from Iraq

**“I can do it...”** by Lisa Lawson, Mosul Resident Office

Next month I will have been deployed in Iraq for two years. I’m a Project Engineer in the Mosul Resident Office of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Gulf Region North District. What a life-changing experience! The Iraqi infrastructure suffers from over 35 years of neglect and damage. The Corps of Engineers has construction management oversight for an \$11 billion Iraq Reconstruction Program. In that program, I have managed over 110 projects; nearly \$40 million; projects involving repairing or restoring water treatment plants for drinking water; sewer and water networks; Iraqi Army barracks; schools; and resurfacing roads and pothole repair. Our mission is to provide quality, responsive, full spectrum engineering services in Iraq in support of military and civil construction, and aggressively assist the Iraqi government to assume full responsibility for national reconstruction. These projects involve working with and training Iraqis to manage and implement their own projects to rebuild Iraq.

The days go fast. I have never managed this type of work before. It’s challenging; especially since the rules are a little different than they would be in the States, and it’s dangerous to leave camp. I feel fortunate with my living conditions. We’re housed two-per-trailer with a shared bathroom. Bottled water is everywhere to use for consumption. We have good food to eat. There’s a gym to use for exercise. I jog on the road outside of the runway fence. Our camp is next to the Mosul Airfield. There’s always some activity with the helicopters, jets, gun-firing, and mortars coming in and out. I have my individual body armor, or IBA, and Kevlar helmet handy. We’re not allowed to leave our parameter—LSA Diamondback—without our private security detail, or PSD, or fly out on a Blackhawk helicopter to our project sites and meetings. The PSD travels in a group of special-armored vehicles. They give a briefing before we travel and tell us they will protect us with their lives...and they do.

I’m proud of the work I’m doing here in Iraq. Although the conditions are dangerous, I feel I’m making a good contribution to the start of rebuilding a country that has somehow been left behind in modern advancement. So many Iraqis appreciate us being here, the smiles on the children’s faces say it all.

I encourage and recommend a deployment to Gulf Region Division in the Iraq Reconstruction Program. It’s a humbling, rewarding and patriotic experience. Your experiences here will become a part of history. I feel it’s a life event that takes one to a new, higher level of life. Your limits are pushed; you become a stronger person, and you gain a greater appreciation for life.

My co-workers are a fantastic group of people. Over the last two years, there are so many I have shared experiences and friendships with. I will miss them and remember them always. I want to thank my family, especially my husband, Denny. Their support and love was amazing through this deployment. I could not have made it without them. I also thank my co-workers from SWT, Bill Smith and Cliff Warren. With their encouragement and confidence they expressed in me, I was able to succeed and say, “I can do it.”

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